

Boon Island Light Tower

HABS No. ME-122

Boon Island

(9 miles off York Harbor, 6 miles southeast
of Cape Neddick, at latitude 43 degrees 07.3
minutes north, longitude 70 degrees 28.6
minutes west)

York County

Maine

HABS

ME

16-BOONI

1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ME-122

BOON ISLAND LIGHT TOWER

HABS
ME
16-BOON

Location: Boon Island, York County, Maine (9 miles off York Harbor, 6 miles southeast of Cape Neddick, at latitude 43 degrees 07.3 minutes north, longitude 70 degrees 28.6 minutes west).

Present Owner: United States Government

Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard lighthouse keepers.

Present Use: Aid to navigation.

Statement of Significance: Site has been in continuous use as a light station since 1812. Tower is typical mid-nineteenth-century lighthouse structure of a kind rapidly becoming obsolete.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Commonwealth of Massachusetts ceded Boon Island to United States on February 26, 1811 without fee.
2. Date of erection: Present tower erected 1854, first lighted January 1, 1855. Present keepers' double dwelling erected 1854, interior rebuilt in 1889. Additional keeper's house built 1905. (Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Treasury.)
3. Architect: Apparently W. B. Franklin, 1st Lt., Corps of Topographical Engineers and Lighthouse Inspector. The architect Alexander Parris (1780-1852) was employed to examine the previous lighthouse in 1852 and recommended building a new tower. Contractor Joseph W. Coburn of Chelsea, Mass. supplied granite for \$22,000.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Site plan and profile showing earlier buildings surveyed and drawn by Brown and Hastings, signed Gridley Bryant, Engineer, dated 1850 and Coburn's granite contract dated December 10, 1853 are in National Archives, Washington, D.C. (Bryant had built boat slip in 1847 for \$693.67.) Elevation drawing dated 1888 showing wrought-iron braces is in office of First Coast Guard District, Boston, Mass.

5. Alterations and additions: Six sets of wrought-iron stay rods were installed in 1888 to check vibration of revolving lantern. Rods were lengthened in 1902. Interior of double dwelling was gutted and rebuilt with addition of upper story in 1889. Additional keeper's house was built in 1905.
6. Important old views: None found (except Bryant plan, vide supra).

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

According to tradition, Boon Island received its name from the gratitude of four castaways who survived the wreck of the "Increase" in April, 1682. The men had despaired of rescue from the barren isle, it is said, and so appreciated the boon of being fetched safely ashore after smoke from their fire had been sighted that they named the island "Boon."

Act of Congress of March 2, 1811 provided "That the Secretary of the Treasury be authorized, on being satisfied that Boon Island, in the district of Maine, in the State of Massachusetts, is a fit and eligible site for a light-house, and that one ought to be erected thereon, to cause a light-house to be built on the said island: Provided, that the legislature of Massachusetts shall vest the property of the said island in the United States, and cede jurisdiction of the same." (Cession had already been granted on February 26, 1811.) Original appropriation was \$3,000, \$2,590.69 spent in 1812 and \$409.31 in 1813. Act of March 3, 1831 authorized appropriation of \$4,000 "for increasing the height of the light-house on Boon Island." \$3,406.65 was spent in 1831. Act of August 31, 1852 "For rebuilding the light-house and keeper's house on Boon Island in the State of Maine" appropriated \$25,000, which was spent in 1854. Act of August 3, 1854 "For procuring illuminating apparatus, and completing the light-house tower and buildings authorized to be built on Boon Island" appropriated \$19,973, which was spent in 1855.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records of the United States Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives, Washington, D. C. 20408. Files, First Coast Guard District, J. F. Kennedy Federal Building, Government Center, Boston, Mass. 02203.
2. Secondary and published sources:
 - a. Annual Reports of the Secretary of the Treasury.
Washington: Government Printing Office, 1855 ff.

- b. Federal Writers' Project. Maine, A Guide to 'Down East'. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937.
- c. Sterling, Robert T/hayer/. Lighthouses of the Maine Coast and the Men Who Keep Them. Brattleboro, Vt.: Stephen Daye Press, 1935.

HABS
ME
16-BOON

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Tall, slightly tapered round granite ashlar light tower with low subsidiary structures nearby.
2. Condition of fabric: Well-maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Base at grade, 25' diameter; 12'-6" diameter at top; height 118' (133' above high water).
2. Foundations: Lowest granite course, 7' thick, 38' diameter; top foundation course, 3'-6" thick, 21' diameter; total height 15'.
3. Wall construction: Granite ashlar courses 2' high secured by iron lewis-clamps with all joints cross-clamped; shaft wall lined with brick (140,000 bricks were used). Diameter of shaft above foundation is 20', 12'-6" at top. Ashlar varies in thickness from 3' at base of shaft to 1'-6" at top. Above 90'-high shaft is flaring cavetto cornice 6' high with parapet 7' high supporting lantern.
4. Framing: Wrought-iron tie-rods applied to exterior to counteract vibration of revolving light do not support bearing wall structure.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Entrance to tower from short enclosed passage to keeper's house measures 7' x 3'. Doorway in parapet below lantern measures 5' x 2'.
 - b. Windows: Fourteen windows 3' x 2' are set within deep reveal in series of seven above each other on opposite faces of shaft to light staircase.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Round metal dome with finial covers lantern.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Granite cavetto cornice forms soffit of iron-railed deck encircling granite parapet supporting lantern.
- c. Cupola: Eighteen-sided iron lantern of fifty-four lights capped by dome shelters revolving light.

HABS
ME
16-BOON
1-

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Round vertical shaft contains stairs. Round platform supports light mechanism and lantern.
2. Stairway: Spiral cast-iron stairway (painted gray) ascends from base to lantern.
3. Lighting: 70,000 candlepower second order light flashes white.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Boon Island, six and a half miles offshore, has approximately a half-acre of barren rock exposed at high water.
2. Enclosures: None
3. Outbuildings: Double dwelling, 40' x 24', massive granite ashlar (foundation 1' thick, walls 9' thick, courses 2' high, masonry 12' high overall) with clapboarded frame upper story, two bays, one and a half stories, rectangular with rear ell 24' x 13' (masonry 10' high) wooden shingled gable roof with ridge parallel with front, two small brick chimneys. Granite walls built 1854, interior rebuilt and upper story added, 1889.

Single dwelling, three bays, two stories, gable roof, L-shaped frame structure. Built 1905.

Oil house, 11'-4" x 14'-10", brick and stone, wooden shingled hipped roof with timber belfry. Built 1887-9.

Boathouse and slip, frame structure, gable roof, built 1869, rebuilt at undetermined date.

4. Walks: Unsheltered wooden boardwalks with iron and wooden railings connect buildings with each other.
5. Landscaping: None

Prepared by Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
May 2, 1967